

### ***- Hall's Bill Would Prevent Increases in Private Security Contractors -***

*Washington, DC* – U.S. Representative John Hall (D-NY19) introduced legislation today that would prevent increases in the number of private security contractors operating in Iraq.

Hall's bill, The Freeze Private Contractors in Iraq Act, would prohibit federal agencies from entering into contracts that would increase the number of private security contractors in Iraq above the number present in Iraq on September 1, 2007.

"It is past the time for us to reduce our involvement in Iraq," said Hall. "As the President is forced to reduce troop levels in Iraq due to a lack of replacement troops, our presence must actually decrease, not be supplemented by an increase in security contractors who operate with little to zero accountability."

Since the beginning of the Iraq War, the use of private security contractors has multiplied exponentially. The number of armed contractors operating in the battle zone is unprecedented in the history of U.S. military engagements. News reports estimate that the number ranges from 20,000 to 50,000 or higher. According to federal spending data, since 2004 federal agencies have paid almost \$1 billion to the contractor agency Blackwater USA alone.

Security contractors in Iraq operate outside both the Uniform Code of Military Justice and Iraqi law. During the first year of the American occupation, the American Administrator issued a decree that exempted security companies and their employees from accountability under Iraqi law for deaths and injuries caused in the execution of their duties.

"These private security contractors operate in a virtual no-man's-land when it comes to the law," said Hall. "These guys are running around Iraq accountable to no one, using lethal force against civilians and increasing the animosity Iraqis feel towards Americans, thereby making the situation less safe for American troops in the field."

Hall is also a co-sponsor of two bills, H.R. 2740 and H.R. 369, which would establish legal accountability for private security contractors operating in a war zone. H.R. 369, The Transparency and Accountability in Security Contracting Act, would clarify that all private security workers operating under contract (or subcontract) by a government agency in the war zone are subject to the Military Extraterritorial Justice Act (MEJA), which is to be enforced by the Department of Justice. H.R. 2740, would ensure that all contractors working for a U.S. government agency would be covered by federal criminal codes. H.R. 2740 would also establish F.B.I. investigative units in the war zone charged with investigating allegations of misconduct.